

Ursuline Academy,  
Academy Building Addition  
300 Augusta Street  
San Antonio  
Bexar County  
Texas

HABS No. TX-32-B

HABS  
TEX,  
IS-SANT,  
TB-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

URSULINE ACADEMY, ACADEMY BUILDING ADDITION

HABS No. TX-32-B

Location: 300 Augusta Street, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.

Present Owner: Link Cowen.

Present Occupant: Vacant.

Significance: This building was the first expansion of the Ursuline Academy since its founding in 1851 and is evidence of the growth and immediate success that this institution achieved.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1853-5.
2. Architect, builder, contractor: According to an undated, unsigned statement located in the present Ursuline archives, Reverend Dubuis was the architect and builder of the addition and he "sawed and hammered himself."

A contract for the plastering of this building, dated October 12, 1855, found in the archives of the Ursuline Academy seemed to substantiate the above information. This was an agreement between Francis C. Schmitt and Brother and Reverend Dubuis "to plaster the new building which he (Dubuis) built himself last year." Therefore, the addition, which forms the east wing of the first Academy building, was most likely begun in 1853 but was definitely under construction in 1854 and was completely probably by the end of 1855.

In their agreement Schmitt and Brother contracted "to plaster the new building... in the outside walls, furnishing good sand and good lime, also everthing necessary to make the plaster good and finished white-washed or brown at the choice of the ladies of the convent." On examining the traces of the plaster remaining today, it seems that the "ladies of the convent" decided on the brown color, actually a very light sandy brown. In addition to plastering the exterior walls, Schmitt and Brother were to whitewash inside "in the places where it is needed."

The work to be "made without interruption" was to cost "30¢ for each yard according to the common measure; 1/2 the amount to be paid in time of doing the work and the other when finished" and that "It is well agreed that one half of the doors and windows will not be reckoned in the measurement."

3. Original and subsequent owners: See History section of the Ursuline Academy, HABS No. TX-32.
- B. Historical Context: See History section of the Ursuline Academy, HABS No. TX-32.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure was built as an addition to the Academy complex in the local rubble-stone construction.
2. Condition of fabric: The stone and mortar joints are for the most part in good condition. The east ell has been allowed to deteriorate considerably, particularly on the north elevation. The gallery roof is in very poor condition, as is the door opening on the north of the ell. In essence the building is only in fair condition.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 45' east to west by 68'-4" north to south. The east ell is 22'-4" x 24'-0". The addition is a two-story rectangular structure with a two-story gallery across the south and east facades. The east ell is one-story high.
2. Foundation: Socle of coursed ashlar limestone (on the south 18" above grade), projects 2" out from wall face. Traces of original color may be detected. This was a thin coat of lime plaster with integral color, the original color being a medium to light blue-gray; the second color, a very dark blue-gray. These colors correspond to those of the socle of the first Academy building.
3. Walls: Rubble limestone of local origin, rough dressed face, set in lime mortar with quoins at corners. The walls were originally plastered--on the south, west-south and east facades, a light sandy or dove brown, later white. On the north and west-north elevations the plaster or stucco is more in evidence, particularly on the upper parts of the facades, and here it is a light sandy color with no indication of later white. Condition: generally good.
4. Structural system and framing: Load bearing masonry walls, exterior and interior, with the exception of the west wall which is in fact the old east exterior wall of the first Academy building. Wood floor framing of first floor is inaccessible. The second floor is 2" x 8" joists in good condition. Wood roof framing is 2" x 5-3/4" to 6-1/2" rafters at 24" o.c.

5. Porches: A two-story gallery extends from across the east facade around the south and intersects the south gallery of the first Academy building on the west. The gallery is very plain, supported by 5-1/8" x 5-1/8" solid wood posts on plain square stone plinths. A double 2" x 9" girder is bolted to the wall and the joists are 2" x 4-1/2". The flooring is 1" board. A plain wood railing encloses the upper gallery and has simple rails and balusters. Condition: fair to poor.
6. Chimneys: One chimney of stone is integral with the wall at the southwest corner of the south facade and at the northeast corner of the east facade, 15" x 22" approximately. Another chimney of brick is near the ridge on the east side of the north end, 13" x 17".
7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: All openings are spanned by rough wood lintels, 4" x 4" approximately, which in turn are spanned by crude flat arches composed of roughly shaped voussoirs, relying more on the mortar joints than the cut of the stone for thrust distribution and by their construction appear to be more of a relieving arch for the lintels.

There are six exterior doorways on the lower floor: two on the east facade of the main building (3 lights above and one panel below); two on the west facade (one opening onto the north gallery of the first Academy building (6 lights above and 2 panels below), and one opening onto the south gallery (8 lights above, 9-1/2" x 14", and two molded panels below); one in the north wall of the east ell (door missing); and one in the south wall of the east ell (3 lights above, 13-1/2" x 16-5/8", one panel below). On the second floor there are corresponding openings.

All openings are framed by a wood architrave, 1-1/8" x 3-1/2", having a large bead along the inner edge.

- b. Windows: All window openings are similar to door openings. The architraves the same also; all have wood sills.

The windows are wood sash, four lights each, and are inward opening casements. They are approximately 50" wide outside measurement of architrave. Architraves are plain flat wood with miter joints at the upper corners. Wood sills have butts. Width of stock varies from 3-1/2" to 3-7/8".

All windows originally had two adjustable louvered shutters, four panels each, and complete with outside hooks. Pintel hinges were used on the lower floor windows.

Condition of windows and shutters is fair; the sash for the most part is sound, but many lights have been broken by recent vandalism.

8. -Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is hipped with the ridge running north to south. Original cover was wood shingles nailed onto rough slab stripping. Later the present standing-seam metal roof was applied over the shingles.

Condition of the roof is generally good, but at present time some openings at the eaves on the north side are contributing to deterioration.

- b. Dormers: There are seven diminutive dormers which open into the attic space: one on the west north facade, three on the east, two on the south and one on the west south. These are just large enough to contain a small 6/6 light, wood sash, single-hung window. They have a low pitched, metal-clad, gable roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The original plan of the building was straightforward and simple: the upper and lower floors the same, that is, three oblong rooms each adjoining by multiple doorways, with long axis running east and west.

The center room is entered by a doorway on its west wall. A doorway on the north wall leads to the north room which leads to the one-story ell by a doorway on the west wall. The south room has one doorway on its north wall opening into the center room. This doorway has in recent years been converted into a wall cabinet.

The upper floor follows the same basic plan layout with the exception of the partitions for dormitory space and an enclosed stair hall. The north upper room was originally divided by a transverse partition wall running north to south through the middle. The plan of these rooms was later altered by additional wood partition walls creating four dormitory rooms ranged along the north exterior wall with a hallway along the south interior wall.

The south upper room is similar to the north except that it has one additional room in its northeast corner.

The central upper room opens onto the north and south rooms by four doorways. A partition wall running north to south creates an enclosed stair hall at the west end of this room.

There is an attic space in an unfinished condition.

2. Stairways: A simple wood stairway is located along the west wall in the center room. The first floor stair is a quarter-turn-with-landing type. The lower part of the stair is relatively new; the upper part is plain with a simple rounded rail and thin square section balusters. The risers are 6-1/2" and the treads are 10".

The upper stair leading into the attic is a quarter-turn-with-winders type and is similar to the old portion of the first floor stair.

3. Flooring: Floors are wood, 5" to 6-1/2" wide, tongue-and-groove, varnished, and in good condition. Attic floor is 1" x 6" tongue-and-groove, unfinished.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plastered. Original color was white, later cream and last, green. Condition is fair.

Ceilings are wood, tongue-and-groove, and beaded. They were originally painted blue and are now white. They are in good condition.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are several original doorways in the center room on the lower floor giving access to the north and south rooms. One of these is located in the north wall. They are 37" wide opening, double doors with two molded panels. Trim (3-3/4" wide) is plain except rounded inner edge. The doorway, on the south wall, has been covered over in recent years and fitted with shelves creating a cabinet opening into the south room.

The north room has one doorway in the east wall opening into the east ell.

A doorway, repeated on the upper floor, is located in the west wall (the old east wall of the first Academy building). It has a splayed opening, fully cased in wood and double, and three-panel doors.

On the upper floor there is the door in the west wall leading into the first Academy building which corresponds to the one below it as described above.

On the upper floor, there are three fully-cased openings in each of the north and south walls of the center room. These have double doors and three molded panels, unsplayed openings, and 1" x 3-1/2" plain trim with a rounded inner edge. Another doorway is located in the center of the west partition wall of the center room.

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All dormitory rooms have more recent doors, ca. 1910, and have two molded panels and single-light ventilating transoms.

All doors on the second floor are painted: trim, rails and stiles are dark sandy brown; panels, dark cream.

- b. Windows: Window openings are all splayed and fully cased in wood, and have simple 1" x 3-1/2" trim, as are exterior door openings. The paint color for the trim is dark sandy brown. The casing is cream.
- 6. Trim: Of singular importance is the wood partition forming the western wall of the upper center room. The frame is made of vertical 2" x 4" members with a horizontal rail at door head height with dovetailed joints-into-verticals. The curtain is composed of wide (16") boards (1" to 1-1/2" thick) obviously hand worked, as if with an adz, with the joints covered by 1/4" x 1-3/8" battens, all painted cream.
- 7. Hardware: Most of the older doors have rim locks. The newer ones have mortice locks. The original interior doors have an unusual knob in the lozenge shape of flat metal.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating: Unvented gas space heaters.
  - b. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
- D. Site:
  - 1. General setting and orientation: The long axis of the building runs north and south and forms an east wing of the first Academy Building. Further it is a part of the Ursuline complex of seven separate or adjoining buildings and helps define the north and south courtyards.
  - 2. Landscaping: There is the "garden," bounded by the courtyard on the north and by the eastern portion of the south yard. It is surrounded by shrubs, trees, several retaining pools, a stone grotto with a large statue of the Virgin Mary and a decorative stone walk.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.  
Director, Bexar County Architecture  
Survey  
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The San Antonio project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in the summer of 1968, and was made possible with funds from HABS and two sponsors, the Bexar County Historical Survey Committee and the San Antonio Conservation Society. Under the direction of James Massey, Chief of HABS, the project was carried out by Wesley I. Shank (Iowa State University), project supervisor, and by student assistant architects, Charles W. Barrow (University of Texas); Les Beilinson (University of Miami); William H. Edwards (University of Illinois); and Larry D. Hermesen (Iowa State University) at the HABS field office in the former Ursuline Academy buildings, San Antonio. John C. Garner, Jr., Director of Bexar County Architecture Survey, did the outside work on the written documentaries. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in 1983, for preparation of transmittal to the Library of Congress. Dewey G. Mears of Austin, Texas took the documentary photographs of the San Antonio structures.